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"A BURIED LINK TO SAN FRANCISCO'S PAST: THE APOLLO."

San Franciscans were excited in May of 1978 when construction activity in the heart of the downtown financial district unearthed the remains of a long buried sailing ship...some ten blocks from the bay! Resting almost thirty feet below the level of street and sidewalk, this vessel, once the proud China Trader Niantic, had sailed to San Francisco during the days of the California Gold Rush. There, in the gold-mad days of "'49", she was abandoned by her crew, sold, and then hauled in close to shore to be converted into a floating hotel and warehouse. A disastrous fire in May of 1851 had burned her hull to the waterline. The copperclad bottom of the ship, filled with foodstuffs, merchandise, weapons and clothing, had then settled into the muddy, shallow waters of San Francisco Bay, to be buried under tons of landfill as a rapidly growing San Francisco expanded out into the former waterfront.

The Niantic, along with a score of other buried Gold Rush vessels, lay entombed in mud and darkness for over a century. Gradually, through the years, the vessels were discovered as newer, higher buildings were constructed that required deep foundations. Usually, the finds were minor; the rotted timbers of a ship, or more commonly, pieces of a ship were all that was found. Occasionally the identifiable remains of a ship were found, and an even rarer occurrence was when associated artifacts from the Gold Rush days were found in the hull. It is amazing, then, to comprehend the significance of the 1978 discovery of the Niantic, for, stowed in that hull, exactly where they had been placed during the Gold Rush, were thousands of artifacts. It was as if a section of everyday life in Gold Rush San Francisco had been frozen in time and preserved for the future.

Archaeologists and Historians were overwhelmed by both the promises and problems of the Niantic. It was an unparalleled opportunity in the annals of American Historical archaeology; an "American Pompeii" in the words of one excited Historian. The problems were many; the vessel and its last cargo lay in the midst of unstable mud and sand that threatened to collapse at any time, carrying with city streets and buildings any chances of recovery; the work on the building being erected on the site needed to continue or face delays that cost \$15,000 per day; and there was no money to preserve the vessel or buy enough time to excavate the hull with all due care and professional expertise. The problems proved to be insurmountable, with last minute compromises and lowered expectations saving a scant part of a treasure trove of knowledge. Much was lost; and what was saved was only through the dedicated work of untrained and well meaning volunteers who worked virtually non-stop to hastily remove the cargo before the bulldozers destroyed all.

What followed in the wake of the Niantic's destruction was anything but productive. Professionals from various historical/archaeological agencies, both private and governmental, levelled accusations and charges that were for the most part unwarranted. The blame rests in no one place or on no one person. Since that time, work has progressed, with a few dedicated professionals seeking to salvage all the available knowledge left in the mangled remains of the Niantic's last cargo. Perhaps the most valuable lesson learned, however, is that steps must be taken, at any cost, to prevent another Niantic from happening in San Francisco. And the time is now.

Beneath the corner of Battery and Sacramento streets, no more than two blocks from the site of the Niantic, rests the Gold Rush ship Apollo. Like the

Niantic, the Apollo sailed to San Francisco in 1849, was hauled in close to shore, and was converted to other uses. The Apollo perished in the same fire that burned the Niantic, and, like her neighbor, still rests below the city with a hull filled with artifacts. The Apollo is also San Francisco's last such resource known to exist. That is why, no matter what the cost, the Apollo must not suffer the fate of the Niantic.

At the present time, the Apollo rests beneath the foundations of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. There she might rest peacefully, if it were not for the recent Federal Reserve Bank decision to vacate the site and move to a new highrise building elsewhere. Federal Reserve Bank officials estimate the move to take place in about three years time; after which the bank's old building stands a good chance of being sold and demolished to make way for a new highrise structure on the site. If and when that happens, the Apollo's remains will be uncovered, and, like the Niantic, risk destruction. It is imperative, then, that the presence, history, and significance of the Apollo be noted so the vessel will be saved.

The Apollo was probably built sometime around 1830 as a packet ship in the European trade. A three-masted, full rigged ship, she was approximately 120 feet long with a beam of about 30 feet, and drew 412 tons. Unfortunately, nothing is known of her early career; Lloyd's Register of Shipping lists many "Apollo" named vessels during her career, hampering positive identification of the Apollo which eventually sailed to San Francisco. She was probably American-built and similar to the many commercial vessels of her day; sturdy, stocky, and with "bluff bows". There was nothing to set apart from her peers save her involvement with the California Gold Rush.

When news of the California gold discovery reached the East Coast of the United States, Moses Yale Beach, a prominent publisher, purchased the Apollo. Beach planned to fill her hold with merchandise to sell in the inflated Gold Rush market. Beach also made space available for paying passengers, all of whom were eager to sail to San Francisco, the gateway to California's "gold diggins." Beach offered low rates of passage, as a handbill he ordered printed advertised:

A PASSAGE TO THE GOLD REGION FOR \$75!
FOR SAN FRANCISCO DIRECT
The Splendid A.No.1 Newly Coppered
PACKET SHIP APOLLO

Recently in the European Trade, having most of her freight engaged, will sail for
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA,
and the gold region in that vicinity...

Beach wanted the vessel to be in top shape for the voyage ahead. The handbill indicates the ship was "newly coppered" and that "...the ship will, in a day or two be occupied entirely by carpenters, stevedores and other mechanics, busily engaged in fitting up berths, stowing freight, taking in provisions, and making other provisions for the voyage."

The Apollo sailed from New York on January 16, 1849. Early that evening the 67 passengers embarked upon their long voyage as the Apollo left her berth at the foot of Chambers street on New York's North River and headed for sea. According to the New York Herald, the sailing was New York's loss:

The emigrants now leaving us for California appear to be remarkably orderly, respectable, and intelligent. They are men of energy and enterprise, and full of enthusiasm. It is a character of the emigration that we do not (as we willingly would) get rid of the worst part--the idle, the rowdies, the vagabonds--of our population, but we lose--with regret we say--the finest portion of our youth, and in all cases such as possess some means--such as are not impelled to immigrate by want, but who rush forward in eager haste to the golden regions, from sheer ambition. The dissolute, idle, and necessitous, who with brawny arms and active limbs encumber our almshouses and fill our streets with mendicants and burglars, are those who are left behind...So much the better for California--so much the worse for us.

Among the passengers on the Apollo was twenty-one year old Joseph Perkins Beach, sent along to act as his father's agent and as supercargo for the vessel. Beach kept a daily journal of the voyage, and it is through this document that we know of the Apollo's passage to California. By January 17, just one day after the Apollo's departure, the "remarkably orderly, respectable and intelligent" passengers had begun "to grumble about the provisions." On January 19, Beach noted "if a vote could have been taken...we would have put back, leaving the "gold diggins" to persons of greater stability and hardihood..." It was around this time that the ship began to leak, but amazingly, "the passangers don't seem to mind the leakage, and the sailors seem to take it as a matter of course."

By February 26, most of the passengers were in drunken stupors. On that date, one passenger, "in a fit of drunken bravado, threw himself **into** the water alongside of the ship..." He almost drowned before being rescued. It was with this in mind, perhaps, that Beach recorded, with a shudder, the threat of some drunken passengers "to tie a rope to me & tow me astern" when he would not let them rifle some of the ship's stores.

After reaching Rio de Janeiro, the Apollo stayed for almost a month, finally braving a rough passage around Cape Horn. The passage was rough, with almost incessant rain and howling gales that snapped a topgallant studdingsail yard in half and sent it crashing to the deck. The foul weather also affected the already surly passengers, who had begun fighting with the crew. After leaving the weather wracked Cape Horn, the Apollo began beating her way north to San Francisco. A three week stop-over in Callao, Peru did little to improve the disposition of the passengers; on July 25, the ship's doctor accused several passengers, including Beach, of poisoning his food. He soon recovered, however.

It must have been with great relief that the Apollo's crew navigated her through the Golden Gate on September 18, 1849. By that afternoon, the ship was riding at anchor off San Francisco and the disgruntled passengers were taking their leave. Joseph Beach had headed ashore almost instantly to learn of any news from his father. He had headed for the office of Cooke, Baker and Company, friends of his father, who had recently located their offices in a most unique place...the hull of a former China trader known as the Niantic. After her arrival in San Francisco in July of 1849, the Niantic had been deserted by her gold fevered crew, hauled in close to shore, and converted into a warehouse and offices.

The Apollo met the same fate. By September 20, at least four members of the crew had deserted. It was not before long that the Apollo was practically empty. Beach, realizing the futility of attempting to raise a new crew, decided to follow the example of the Niantic and haul the Apollo in for conversion. It was a far more attractive alternative than letting her rot at anchor.

Beach's journal entry of September 26 records that "the ship was hauled in today, but through the night she went afoul of an English brig. Some damage was done." Once close to shore, the Apollo was stripped of her cargo, ballast, spars and rigging. With pilings to stabilize her in the shallow water, she was ready for conversion. Doors and windows were cut into the hull, and the area above deck was housed over. A painting of the ship done about this time shows her as she looked during conversion; a hull, lying in the mud, housed over, with her discarded anchor and other fittings lying in the mud around her.

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The conversion was supervised by Joseph Perkins Beach and his older brother Henry Day Beach, who had arrived in San Francisco on September 26. Henry, as the eldest, took the leading role in the business. After the ship had been converted, Henry advertised in the January 4, 1850 edition of the San Francisco Alta California for:

WHARFING AND CARPENTER WORK--The undersigned desires proposals for carpenter work and for wharfing around the ship Apollo, now lying off Central Wharf. For particulars inquire on board. For this purpose a boat will be sent from the ship, upon the vessel being hailed from the wharf, between the hours of 10 A.M. and 3 P.M.

H.D. BEACH

The wharfing was an absolute necessity as the ship was surrounded by water, and high tide was the only time a small craft could reach it; at all other times it was surrounded by shallow water and thick mud.

Work on the wharfing must have been completed quickly, for an advertisement in the January 18, 1850 edition of the Alta California told of the Apollo's availability--just two weeks after the advertisement for wharfing proposals!

SAFE STORAGE.--The undersigned are prepared to receive goods upon moderate rates of storage on board ship Apollo adjoining Central Wharf, free from marine and fire risks, and approachable by lighters at nearly all tides; it is believed that contemplated improvements will render this ship the most commodious, spacious, and safe storage warehouse in this port. Merchandise for sale--galvanized iron houses complete can be set up in a few hours for \$250, for \$500, and for \$1300. Also a lot of fancy articles, envelope paper, thin clothing, shawls, mule bags, prime pork, standing and running rigging, blocks, refuse iron, etc., etc. Office Montgomery street, next south of and adjoining United States Hotel.

H.D. BEACH & CO.

Henry Beach also ordered the printing of a broadsheet advertising the Apollo; it is the only known example of an illustrated advertisement for one of San Francisco's Gold Rush vessels; unfortunately the only known copy's location is unknown. The lithographed illustration of the ship, while somewhat disproportionate, does accurately depict the Apollo's placement and surrounding wharves.

The Beach brothers sublet a small portion of the vessel to Messrs. Wise and Leonard, who operated, out of the stern, the well-known Apollo Saloon. The saloon, with an adjacent eatery, was a well loved San Francisco establishment. In later years, San Francisco saloon keepers T.A. Barry and B.A. Patten fondly recalled it in their book Men and Memories of San Francisco in the Spring of '50:

How many men now living in all the glory of soup, fish and three courses daily, from the artistic hand of a chef, can well remember the pie, doughnuts and coffee they took with a royal relish, at the stand in the old ship Apollo, on Battery street.

Two bits for a cup of coffee; two bits for a piece of pie; or if hunger and economy were to be considered, two doughnuts for a quarter of a dollar. Hardly anybody said "two bits" or quarter of a dollar in those days. It was "dos reales!" "cuatro reales!" "un peso!" Nearly all the new comers had either crossed the Isthmus or come by the "Horn," stopping at old Spanish cities enroute, picking up sufficient de la lengua to ask for anything they wished to purchase. This coffee stand was made by cutting into the Apollo's hull, just under the cabin windows, and many a man who stepped ashore from his long, weary voyage, took his first meal in California at this place.

After Joseph Perkins Beach left for the East Coast in the late summer of 1850, Henry leased the Apollo to the firm of Reese and Blakely. The change in management was advertised in the August 29, 1850 edition of the San Francisco Evening Picayune:

APOLLO WAREHOUSE.—The undersigned having leased the Storeship and Warehouse known as the "Apollo Warehouse," would state that they are now ready to receive on storage, any and all kinds of merchandise, trunks, chests, etc.

Charges are as reasonable as any other storeship
in the harbor.

Apply on board, between Central Wharf and Sacramento
st. wharf.

REESE & BLAKELY

Unfortunately for Reese and Blakely, the Apollo's usefulness as a storeship was quickly ending. The expanding city surrounded her with streets and buildings as new construction on pilings pushed out over the shallow waters of the bay. As the land beneath these structures was filled, the Apollo was hemmed in by blocks of structures, becoming, in the process, a building. As Gold Rush visitor Frank Marryat explained:

The front of the city is extending rapidly into the sea... this has left many of the old ships, which were a year ago beached as Store-houses, in a curious position; for the filled in space that surrounds them has been built upon for some distance, and new streets run between them and the sea, so that a stranger puzzles himself for some time to ascertain how the Apollo and Niantic became perched in the middle of the street.

By May of 1851 the Apollo was indeed "perched in the middle of the street." Her hull was surrounded by scores of other wooden buildings, with planked streets built over pilings providing access. It is not surprising, then, to understand the great fear of fire in the wood and canvas town. Fire destroyed San Francisco many times during the Gold Rush years, with the worst fire occurring on May 3-4, 1851. That fire, which burned so quickly as to trap victims in buildings and destroy over two thousand buildings in the center of town, was seen over a hundred miles distant. When the flames subsided, much of San Francisco was gone, including the Apollo and the Niantic.

However, not all of the Apollo was burned. Everything below the waterline was saved as the fire stopped there when the wet mud and water began to pour into the hull, which then sank, preserving the bottom of the ship and all of the goods stored within.

The buried remains of the Apollo rested in a few feet of murky water and mud. To the casual observer, the ship was gone, as was the Niantic. Apparently no effort was made to salvage the ships, which were soon filled over with sand and earth and the sites built upon by new buildings. For the next century, San Francisco grew and built many buildings over the grave of the Apollo, which finally lay entombed in the mud and darkness some thirty feet below the street. The hull of the Apollo may have been slightly encountered during construction work in 1900, but whatever intrusion happened at that time was minor.

In 1921, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco began construction of a new headquarters building over the site of the Apollo. On January 15, 1921, workers uncovered the hull of the Euphemia, a small brig which had served as a prison ship near the Apollo. At this time, according to Federal Reserve Bank officials, "pilings from the central and branch wharves which linked the Apollo to the shore were found to be still in excellent condition." However, the hull of the Anollo was not encountered until 1925, during a deep excavation behind the bank on the corner of Battery and Sacramento streets.

The discovery was reported in the May 5, 1925 edition of the San Francisco Bulletin:

WORKERS FIND BURIED SHIP

A "treasure ship" of the days of old that sailed during the craze for gold in the days of forty nine was unearthed 36 feet below the ground at Sacramento and Sansome streets today.

"The Apollo" was written in golden letters on her high stern in the time when San Francisco was young. While working men were digging in the rear of the Federal Reserve Bank they "collided" with the rudder of the old craft. And the vessel--what part of it could be reached--proved to be a treasure ship of relics of the old days that live now only in memory. Among the rotting timbers were coins of 1840,

an American penny of 1823, a British penny of 1797, pipes, a large nugget, a sextant, ship's fittings and pieces that delight the hearts of those who love rare things...

Apparently the workers had struck the area of the Apollo Saloon--the rudder indicates the stern of the ship--for in addition to the money and pipes they also found labels for bottles of gin and other liquors. The Sacramento and Sansome street location given in the article is the location of the front of the bank building, hence the excavation in the rear of the bank would be at Sacramento and Battery streets, which is the accepted historical location of the Apollo's stern.

Very little of the ship was disturbed in 1925, and as the ship rested beneath the building, further excavation was impossible. The stern area was then reburied. The presence of the historic ship intrigued the Federal Reserve Bank officials. The artifacts were cleaned and placed in display cases inside the bank, and eventually the bank purchased the Beach journal and brought it to San Francisco. The only public display of these items was in 1951, when the bank loaned them to the recently opened San Francisco Maritime Museum.

Since that exhibition, the artifacts have rested in the Federal Reserve Bank, which for obvious security reasons could not provide unlimited public access. However, in early 1978, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco indicated to the National Park Service, which recently integrated the Maritime Museum into the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, that they were considering a transfer of the artifacts and Beach journal. The reason for the transfer was simple; the bank was moving from the Sacramento street location and once removed from the site they would have no association with the Apollo.

The National Park Service and the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco negotiated a transfer of the artifacts to the Maritime Museum collection, with a public transfer ceremony to take place in January of 1980. There, inside the oft-visited Maritime Museum, the Apollo artifacts and the Beach journal will be a new exhibit in the museum's Gold Rush Room.

Meanwhile, the Apollo still rests beneath the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. The bulk of the hull contains thousands of Gold Rush artifacts, untouched and unseen since the fire of May 4, 1851. When the Federal Reserve Bank relocates, sometime in the near future, the vessel will be in an endangered position. Hopefully this time San Francisco will be prepared to save the last Gold Rush storeship left intact. San Francisco must do this...it cannot afford another Niantic.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Most of the pioneer work on the buried Gold Rush vessels of San Francisco was done in 1963 by the late Al Harmon, Harlan Soeten, and Karl Kortum of the San Francisco Maritime Museum. Any subsequent work on these vessels owes much to their pioneer study. The Beach journal is a rare and wonderful document and provides much insight into the voyage of a Gold Rush ship and the times. Mr. George Galloway of the Federal Reserve Bank was extremely helpful and was responsible for the eventual transfer of the Federal Reserve Bank's Apollo collection to the National Park Service. The Niantic recovery disaster can be followed in a series of articles written by the San Francisco Examiner staff between May 4-12, 1978.

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ILLUSTRATION NOTES

- 1...Salvage Work, Niantic. May 5, 1979. View West. Note the ribs and frames of the vessel extend to where they were burned off at the waterline. The artifacts have been removed in this photo. Courtesy of Bertrand Conservation Laboratory, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. (No Use Fee)
- 2...Advertisement for Apollo. New York: December, 1848 (?) Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- 3...San Francisco in 1850, possibly 1851. This is the only photographic representation of the Niantic and the Apollo. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. (No Use Fee)
- 4...The Apollo hauled in to shore. Watercolor. December, 1849 (?) Note the conversion. This is the painting referred to on page 6 of the text. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. (No Use Fee)
- 5..."Apollo Warehouses" Advertisement. January, 1850 (?) This is the lithograph referred to on page 8 of the text. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. (No Use Fee)
- 6...The Apollo Saloon. From the Century Illustrated Monthly of 1892 as reproduced in Beilharz and Lopez; We Were 49ers! Page 88. This is a very accurate rendering. (No Use Fee)
- 7...Map Showing the locations of the Apollo, Niantic, Euphemia and other buried Gold Rush vessels in the vicinity. (No Use Fee)
- 8...Apollo and Niantic. Drawn by Frank Marryat, this sketch is an inaccurate representation of the two vessels. Marryat termed this drawing "High and Dry". See page 9 of the text for Marryat's comments. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. (No Use Fee)
- 9...The Apollo and the Euphemia. From the Annals of San Francisco (New York:1856) A fairly accurate representation. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. See page 10 of the text. (No Use Fee)
- 10..The fire of May3-4, 1851. Note the Apollo Saloon just beginning to burn. An engraving of the time. Courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. (No Use Fee)